
From: insider@ncinsider.com [insider@ncinsider.com]
Sent: 7/18/2017 12:07:39 AM
To: NC Insider [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=03d899d89f174a119e5ff45f3320ff12-NC Insider]
Subject: Insider for July 18, 2017

- [Today's Insider \(PDF\)](#)



YOU DON'T SAY...

"This bill would compromise transparency in Guilford County, not improve it, and jeopardize the public's right to be informed about important issues."

Daniel Finnegan, Greensboro News & Record Editor and Publisher, on House Bill 205 that targets Guilford County newspapers running legal notices. Gov. Roy Cooper vetoed the bill Monday.

WRAL NEWS, 7/17/17

Table of Contents - The Insider for July 18, 2017

- [News Summary](#)
- [Legislative Studies and Meetings](#)
- [N.C. Government Meetings and Hearings](#)
- [N.C. Dept. of Environmental Quality](#)
- [N.C. Utilities Commission Hearing Schedule](#)
- [UNC Board of Governors](#)
- [Other Meetings and Events of Interest](#)

News Summary

Hiring Scheme

Craig Blitzer, a former Rockingham County district attorney, pleaded guilty in Wake County Superior Court on Monday to playing a part in a scheme that allowed him and a district attorney in a neighboring district to hire each other's wives and pay them for doing little to no work. Sentencing was postponed for Blitzer, who resigned in March amid a State Bureau of Investigation probe into the allegations that state money had been misused to carry out the plan. Wake County District Attorney Lorrin Freeman told Judge Donald Stephens that Blitzer, a Republican, had been cooperating. Freeman said he agreed to continue cooperating with investigators as they looked further into the actions of Wallace Bradsher, former district attorney for Person and Caswell counties who also has been accused of failure to discharge the duties of his office. "This is not a happy day for anybody," Freeman said after the hearing. "As DAs, we are

elected to uphold the law to try and make a determination between right and wrong on behalf of our communities, and it's important we uphold the highest ethical standards. And clearly today, by having a sitting DA who has been forced out of office to come in and plead to willfully failing to discharge his duties, it's a disappointing day."

Blitzer and his attorney declined to discuss the case after the hearing. The charges stem from an arrangement that investigators contend the two district attorneys made after Blitzer was elected Rockingham County district attorney in November 2014. Blitzer served as district attorney from Jan. 1, 2015, until his resignation in March.

Blitzer had been a successful defense attorney, Freeman told Stephens in laying out her case against Blitzer. After Blitzer was elected, he worried about being able to continue to provide for his family financially on a public salary as he had while in private practice, Freeman said. Bradsher, a Republican, talked with Blitzer around that time about the plan to hire their spouses, Freeman told the judge. While state ethics rules allow legislators to hire their spouses, district attorneys are prohibited from employing family members. So the district attorneys decided to try to get around the rule, and the wives swapped jobs.

The SBI probe found that Pam Bradsher did the work she was paid to do by Blitzer. But investigators found that Cindy Blitzer was taking nursing classes at a school in High Point when Bradsher reported that she was on the clock. Freeman said Blitzer raised questions about what kind of work his wife should be doing while on a trip to a district attorneys conference at the Outer Banks several years ago. Freeman said Bradsher told Blitzer not to worry about it.

Blitzer has been under public scrutiny since October when Superior Court Judge Joe Crosswhite confirmed the SBI was investigating the two district attorney offices over allegations that state money was stolen. Crosswhite had ordered the investigation in July 2016 at the recommendation of the state Administrative Office of the Courts.

In January, Debra Halbrook, a former employee in Bradsher's office, filed a whistleblower lawsuit alleging that she was fired for reporting the district attorneys to the SBI. As part of a plea arrangement, Blitzer has agreed to provide information to prosecutors as Bradsher's case remains unresolved. He also paid \$48,000 to the Administrative Office of the Courts, money that was paid to his wife to benefit his family. No charges were filed against the wives. Freeman said Blitzer could be a key part of the prosecution's case against Bradsher. He also could be called to testify in Halbrook's whistleblower lawsuit.

Freeman said Monday that had it not been for the actions of Halbrook, the scheme might not have been revealed to investigators and the larger public. (Anne Blythe, THE NEWS & OBSERVER, 7/17/17).

Guilford Co. Newspapers

Gov. Roy Cooper vetoed legislation Monday that targeted Guilford County newspapers for a loss of government advertising revenue. One small-town newspaper owner had said the change would close his publication. House Bill 205 came from a longstanding push by state Sen. Trudy Wade, R-Guilford, to roll back state requirements that various legal notices run in a local newspaper, something local governments must pay for. She scaled the bill back this session to turn it partially into a pilot program in Guilford County, home to the Greensboro News & Record and a handful of other papers.

Publishers from the county implored the governor to veto the bill, and the Jamestown News ran a front-page banner headline promising "Trudy Wade's Bill Will Close Jamestown News."

"GOVERNOR'S VETO IS OUR LAST HOPE," it announced earlier this month.

Wade and other bill supporters, including Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger, a Rockingham County Republican whose district includes parts of Guilford County, said the bill was about modernizing legal notices and saving local governments money. It would have allowed governments to publish notices on a website instead of paying to advertise in a local newspaper. This would have been a local option, not required.

Cooper dismissed the bill as an attempt by legislators to use "the levers of big government to attack important institutions in our state who may disagree with them from time to time."

"Unfortunately, this legislation is another example of that misguided philosophy meant to specifically threaten and harm the media," he said in a veto statement. Wade said in her own

statement that Cooper's "veto of bipartisan legislation eliminating special carve-outs for the newspaper industry makes it clear his number one priority is brown-nosing those who cover him." The bill had some statewide impact, including from language that dealt with part-time newspaper carriers and would have made it easier for them to file worker's compensation claims. Wade said Cooper's "brown nosing" was "to the detriment of the newspaper employees being denied workers compensation coverage" as well as "the taxpayers currently being forced to subsidize newspapers."

There was also language doing away with a requirement that newspapers have a physical address in the county in which they sell public notice space. That would have opened the door for the North State Journal, a statewide publication launched by former members of Gov. Pat McCrory's administration, to run government notices. This bill passed the House 60-53, which is not enough of a margin to overturn Cooper's veto. The count included four Democrats who voted for the bill and 14 Republicans voting against. The Senate vote was 32-14.

The bill was stuck in the House for some time and didn't pass there until after the Senate put the brakes on legislation requested by the wireless industry. Moments after the House approved Wade's bill, Berger announced that the Senate would move forward on the wireless bill, and both bills passed in the waning days of the recent legislative session. Greensboro News & Record Editor and Publisher Daniel Finnegan said in a statement that Cooper deserves "a great deal of credit for standing up to the General Assembly." One of the arguments newspapers made against the bill was that people without internet access would not see important public notices.

The bill continued a state requirement, though, that some notices be mailed to affected people, or be advertised with a sign where appropriate. "I think we made a strong case to him that this bill is not about improving transparency and seems to be an attack on newspapers' 1st Amendment rights," Finnegan said. (Travis Fain, WRAL NEWS, 7/17/17).

Apprenticeship Study

As the state shifts its apprenticeship program from the Department of Commerce to the community college system, a study by the left-leaning N.C. Budget & Tax Center says the program should be expanded with more funding.

The recently approved state budget includes a provision transferring ApprenticeshipNC from the governor's Cabinet agency to the State Board of Community Colleges, which is tasked with appointing an Apprenticeship Board and hiring an executive director for the program. The program will get a net appropriation of \$850,315 annually for the next two years.

On Monday, the N.C. Budget & Tax Center -- part of the liberal N.C. Justice Center -- released its study findings and recommendations for the program. "While there are several routes our policymakers can take to improve our state apprenticeship program, the most direct way for North Carolina to increase the use of apprenticeships -- and in turn create quality jobs and grow wages - - is to increase public funding for apprenticeship initiatives across the state," Victoria Crouse, author of the study, said in a news release. "These funds can subsidize an appropriate portion of the cost to employers as well as the operations of apprenticeship placement, trainings, and evaluation."

The study says North Carolina "falls behind other states when it comes to public funding for apprenticeships," citing a \$3 million investment made by Iowa leaders in 2014. The study found that as of May 1, North Carolina had 5,256 apprentices enrolled in 308 registered apprenticeships overseen by the state program. An additional 577 registered apprenticeships have been approved by the state program but currently have no participants. The report calls on the program to ensure a diverse group of apprentices, including adding more women. "The program's demographic data mirrors the state's population by race and ethnicity, but ApprenticeshipNC can still work towards ensuring more students and adults of color have access to quality apprenticeship across the state," the report says. "By increasing the participation rates of historically excluded groups of workers, ApprenticeshipNC can generate higher economic returns for everyone."

The N.C. Budget & Tax Center is calling on lawmakers to fund a portion of employers' costs in hosting apprentices, and the group suggests expanding the state program to add apprenticeships in fields where such programs aren't common. (Colin Campbell, THE INSIDER, 7/18/17).

Pipeline Ads

The Sierra Club on Monday launched newspaper and online ads to drum up opposition to the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline in eastern North Carolina.

The pipeline would transport natural gas 600 miles from West Virginia to North Carolina, where it would stretch from Northampton County south to near Pembroke in Robeson County.

Dominion, Duke Energy and several other utility companies are building the pipeline, and construction is scheduled to begin later this year. The ads are timed to raise awareness of the project ahead of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality's public hearings on the issue. The hearings are scheduled for July 18 in Fayetteville and July 20 in Rocky Mount. The hearings are on the pipeline project's application for state water quality and buffer permits.

The Sierra Club's ad says "Say NO to Duke Energy's dirty, destructive Atlantic Coast Pipeline." It will appear in newspapers along the pipeline route. "The proposed fracked gas Atlantic Coast Pipeline is a dangerous project that would put our communities' health and safety at considerable risk," Sierra Club organizer Caroline Hansley said in a news release. "We want North Carolinians to be fully informed about the dangerous situation this dirty, expensive project would lock us into. This pipeline must be rejected."

Supporters of the pipeline say it will boost rural economies and help the utility companies transition away from their use of coal, which emits more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere than natural gas. The project is expected to generate a combined \$7.7 million in property tax revenue for the eight counties the pipeline will pass through -- Northampton, Johnston, Cumberland, Nash, Robeson, Halifax, Wilson and Sampson.(Colin Campbell, THE INSIDER, 7/18/17).

Rate Hike

Utility regulators are postponing until Thanksgiving a hearing to decide whether to allow a 15 percent increase in the electricity bills of 1.3 million North Carolina customers. The North Carolina Utilities Commission is acting at the request of consumer advocates to delay hearing from expert witnesses until November 20 in Raleigh. The commission's decision last week postpones plans to grill energy experts a month earlier. The commission plans to hold public meetings in September and October in Rockingham, Raleigh, Asheville, Snow Hill and Wilmington on Duke Energy Progress' request to charge an extra \$477 million a year. That would mean \$18 more per month for the typical household bill of \$105. The subsidiary of the country's largest electric company operates in much of eastern North Carolina and around Asheville.(THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 7/17/17).

H-2B Visas

U.S. business will be able to hire an additional 15,000 foreign workers under the H-2B visa program through the end of September, the Department of Homeland Security announced Monday. The decision could impact North Carolina landscaping, tourism and seafood-production industries, some of which have been unable to secure workers through the program. Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, a proponent of the H-2B program, held up one of President Donald Trump's nominees for the Department of Homeland Security, hoping to pressure DHS Secretary John Kelly to reach a decision on the visa program.

Congress set the annual limit for H-2B visas at 66,000, but unlike in previous years, returning workers counted against the limit. Businesses hit the cap in March, and in May, Congress gave Kelly authority to increase the limit up to 70,000. Kelly called his decision a "one-time increase." "I'm encouraged that Secretary Kelly intends to provide relief to seasonal small businesses across the nation currently suffering from a lack of temporary workers. I look forward to reviewing the details of the rule," Tillis said in a statement released by his office.

President Trump said he has relied on the program in the past to find workers for his golf courses and hotels. H-2B visas can be used by seasonal businesses that determine there are not enough American workers to perform temporary, non-agricultural jobs. Tillis said he is still reviewing the decision and will decide later whether or not to remove the hold on Lee Francis Cissna to be the director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Senate custom allows a single senator to block presidential nominations by using a hold. Only Texas and Colorado used more foreign workers on H-2B visas than North Carolina, according to DHS data through March 31.(Brian Murphy, MCCLATCHY DC, 7/17/17).

Hagan Recovers

Former North Carolina Sen. Kay Hagan is now getting outpatient treatment as she recovers from brain inflammation caused by a virus spread by ticks from animals to humans. Hagan's family told friends and well-wishers that she was discharged earlier this month from an Atlanta rehabilitation hospital she had entered in January. She's now receiving therapy at a nearby outpatient facility, with several more weeks of treatment there expected before she returns to North Carolina, according to a family email.

Hagan, a Greensboro Democrat who served six years in the Senate, was initially hospitalized in Washington last December. She was later moved to Chapel Hill before going to Georgia. Citing a doctor treating her, the family said earlier this year that Hagan's encephalitis developed when she contracted the Powassan virus. "Kay's recovery is going slowly, but we continue to see improvement each week," the family wrote. Hagan is using a walker and her speech is limited, the July 8 email said, but she "clearly understands what people say to her and recognizes her friends when they come to visit," and is keeping up with current events.

Family members said they hope Hagan's illness "has brought some awareness to tick borne illnesses and the Powassan virus in particular." Hagan, 64, previously served in the state Senate before defeating Republican Sen. Elizabeth Dole in 2008. She lost her seat in 2014 to Republican Thom Tillis and later started working as a policy consultant at a Washington law firm.(THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 7/17/17).

ACA Replacement

The latest GOP effort to repeal and replace "Obamacare" was fatally wounded in the Senate Monday night when two more Republican senators announced their opposition to the legislation strongly backed by President Donald Trump. The announcements from Sens. Mike Lee of Utah and Jerry Moran of Kansas left the Republican Party's long-promised efforts to get rid of President Barack Obama's health care legislation reeling. Next steps, if any, were not immediately clear. Lee and Moran both said they could not support Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's legislation in its current form. They joined GOP Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Rand Paul of Kentucky, both of whom announced their opposition right after McConnell released the bill last Thursday. McConnell is now at least two votes short in the closely divided Senate and may have to go back to the drawing board or even begin to negotiate with Democrats, a prospect he's threatened but resisted so far. Or he could abandon the health care effort, which has proven more difficult than many Republicans envisioned after campaigning on the issue for years, and move on to tax legislation, a bigger Trump priority to begin with.

McConnell's bill "fails to repeal the Affordable Care Act or address healthcare's rising costs. For the same reasons I could not support the previous version of this bill, I cannot support this one," said Moran. Lee said, "In addition to not repealing all of the Obamacare taxes, it doesn't go far enough in lowering premiums for middle class families; nor does it create enough free space from the most costly Obamacare regulations." It was the second straight failure for McConnell, who had to cancel a vote on an earlier version of the bill last month when defeat became inevitable.

Trump had kept his distance from the Senate process, but Monday night's development was a major blow for him, too, as the president failed to rally support for what has been the GOP's trademark issue for seven years -- ever since Obama and the Democrats passed the Affordable Care Act. Republicans won the White House and full control of Congress in large part on the basis of their promises to repeal and replace "Obamacare," but have struggled to overcome their deep internal divisions and deliver.

The Senate bill, like an earlier version that barely passed the House, eliminated mandates and taxes under Obamacare, and unraveled an expansion of the Medicaid health care program for the poor and disabled. But for conservatives like Lee and Paul it didn't go far enough in delivering on Republican Party promises to undo Obama's law, while moderates like Collins viewed the bill as too extreme in yanking insurance coverage from millions.(Alan Fram and Erica Werner, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 7/17/17).

Lieutenant Governor Candidate

The next election for lieutenant governor is still more than three years away, but the race already has its first candidate. Clark Twiddy, a Republican from Kitty Hawk, recently launched his

campaign. Lt. Gov. Dan Forest is term-limited from running again in 2020, and he's expected to run for governor. Twiddy owns a real-estate business on the Outer Banks and is a retired lieutenant commander for U.S. Naval Intelligence, according to his campaign website. While Twiddy has never run for elected office before, he currently serves on the N.C. Board of Community Colleges. He says he'd focus on education issues if elected. "Clark will spearhead the ongoing effort to remove Common Core standards from our schools and have them replaced with North Carolina-based standards that best fit the needs of our students," his campaign website says. "Clark will call for reforms to our university system and move more students to our excellent but underutilized community college system. Millions of taxpayer dollars are spent every year in financial aid for students attending state universities who would be better served taking their initial course prerequisites at the more cost-effective community colleges." According to campaign finance filings, Twiddy loaned his campaign \$25,000 when he opened it last month. (Colin Campbell, THE INSIDER, 7/18/17).

OBX Bridge

Construction of a North Carolina bridge to replace the one that links isolated Hatteras Island to the mainland is attracting sightseers even though it's not quite halfway finished. Dare County commissioner Danny Couch tells The Virginian-Pilot of Norfolk, Virginia, that people enjoy crossing the old Bonner Bridge, stopping on the sandy roadside and taking photos of the new structure. "It's going to be one of the single biggest attractions down here just to cross it," Couch said. "It's absolutely fascinating."

The \$250 million span across the Oregon Inlet along North Carolina's Outer Banks will be 2.8 miles long. It's scheduled to open in late 2018. Engineers ran the design through more than 100,000 computer simulations of the 45 worst storms to strike the Outer Banks in the past 160 years, the newspaper reported. They even accounted for a big barge slamming into its supports as happened to the current bridge in 1990.

No other bridge in North Carolina is quite like the Bonner Bridge replacement, said Pablo Hernandez, the bridge's engineer. "It is a civil engineer's dream to work on a project like this," Hernandez said. Both residents and tourists have waited years for the new bridge, which was delayed by legal wrangling and budget concerns. When the original Bonner Bridge was built in 1963, it had an expected life span of 30 years.

State transportation officials and environmental groups reached an agreement in June 2015 that allowed for construction of the new bridge. The environmental groups had wanted a 17-mile route around the wildlife refuge to connect the village of Rodanthe and other communities on Hatteras Island. State officials said it would have cost more than \$1 billion. (THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 7/17/17).

Barber's Comments

Is it a sin to pray for Donald Trump? Rev. William Barber, state president of the NAACP and arguably the loudest voice of protest against North Carolina's Republican power structure, suggested it might be this weekend during a national television interview that ginned up some GOP anger back home. MSNBC's Joy Reid asked Barber about a widely shared picture of Trump in the Oval Office, where he is surrounded by pastors laying hands on the president in prayer. "What do you make of this laying on of hands and this embrace of Donald Trump by the evangelical right, of the Christian right?" Reid asked. Barber started with a reference to U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan and their "very, very, very extreme agenda." Then he called the Oval Office prayer session "a form of theological malpractice that borders on heresy." "When you can p-r-a-y for a president and others while they are p-r-e-y, preying, on the most vulnerable, you are violating the most sacred principles of religion," he said.

North Carolina Republican Party Chairman Robin Hayes responded with a statement condemning Barber's words "in the strongest possible terms." Barber "cast tens of millions of people, of all faiths, who pray for the president as sinners in a nationally broadcasted interview," Hayes said via email. The interview made the rounds online after Breitbart excerpted it and The Washington Post followed suit with its own piece. "Using his role as a supposed faith-based leader to falsely drive

citizens away from praying for the good of our nation and our nation's president is absolutely grotesque," Hayes said.

Reached by telephone Monday, Barber did not apologize. He said he was speaking only of the clergy who give cover to the president's policies, not of the laymen who may offer up an evening prayer for the man in the White House. He ticked off Bible verses that call on the faithful not just to pray, but to act. "When you pray for leaders without critiquing their policies, and you bless them, you're actually enabling them to be unjust," said Barber, who has been arrested in Raleigh and in Washington, D.C., for his protests and is currently banned from the state Legislative Building.

On Reid's AM Joy program, Barber said some pastors are "acting like priests of the empire rather than prophets of God." He referenced \$700 billion in tax cuts contained in the Senate's Affordable Care Act repeal bill, calling it the biggest transfer of wealth "on the backs of the bodies of people since the days of slavery."

State Republican Party Executive Director Dallas Woodhouse said Barber's interview included at least an implicit condemnation of any prayer for the president. He took North Carolina media to task for giving Barber a massive platform without scrutinizing his often hyperbolic language. Even if Barber was speaking only about pastors at the White House, "he is still saying that people shouldn't pray with the president ... and that alone is outrageous," Woodhouse said.

For the record, Cherilyn Williams, spokeswoman for the coalition of churches that Barber's Greenleaf Christian Church in Goldsboro belongs to, said she believes Barber's comments were aimed only at "those particular folks who were laying on hands without challenging the president." (Travis Fain, WRAL NEWS, 7/17/17).

Congressional Fundraising

Just four years ago Republican U.S. Rep. Robert Pittenger cruised to reelection unopposed to win what appeared to be as safe a congressional seat as any in North Carolina. Now the third-term Republican finds himself facing a well-financed Democrat as well as a Republican opponent whom he edged two years ago by just 134 votes. Democrat Dan McCready reported Friday that he raised \$450,000 since announcing his campaign less than two months ago. At the end of June he had \$410,000 in cash on hand -- three times as much as Pittenger.

Democrats have made North Carolina's 9th District one of about 80 that they're targeting next year as they try to pick up the 24 seats they need for control of the House. Though the district leans heavily Republican -- Donald Trump won it by 12 points -- analysts say it could turn. Though Democrats have lost a series of special congressional elections, they've made them close. In South Carolina's 5th District, which Donald Trump won by 18 points last November, Democrat Archie Parnell lost to Rock Hill Republican Ralph Norman last month by just 3.2 points. "There are signs of a Democratic wave emerging," said David Wasserman, a House analyst with the Cook Political Report. "We've seen time and time again the Democratic base is more fired up."

Pittenger reported \$132,000 on hand on June 30. Though less than McCready, it was twice as much as he had at the same time in 2015. And he went on to spend \$1.2 million in the 2016 race. "We have very good support with a dozen planned (fundraising) events to date," Pittenger said in a statement. He has raised a total of \$335,000, according to his finance report. More than 60 percent of that came from political action committees.

A former Marine who served in Iraq, McCready, 33, is making his first bid for office. A graduate of Duke University and Harvard Business School, he's co-founder of Double Time Capital, a Charlotte company that invests in large solar farms. He already has attracted national attention as one of nearly two dozen veterans who plan to run for Congress as Democrats. He has been endorsed by two political groups that back veterans and by Democratic U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton of Massachusetts. Last month former White House chief of staff Erskine Bowles hosted a fundraiser for McCready at his Charlotte home. McCready is one of at least four Democrats who plan to run in the 9th District, which stretches from Charlotte to Fayetteville.

Democrat Christian Cano, who lost to Pittenger last fall, has raised nearly \$34,000, which includes almost \$25,000 from himself. A report for Democrat Maria Warren was unavailable. Warren, 48, a Robeson County resident who teaches law at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke and the University of North Carolina at Wilmington is a former assistant district attorney in Wilmington who entered the race in January. The 9th District was redrawn for the 2016 election. But the

district, which still includes southeast Charlotte and suburban Union County, has consistently voted Republican.(Jim Morrill, THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER, 7/14/17).

Media Criticism

While complaints from local politicians about perceived bias in media coverage aren't unprecedented, Hendersonville Sen. Chuck Edwards kicked it up a notch in remarks to the Council of Independent Business Owners' July 14 breakfast meeting. Brandishing a July 12 copy of the Asheville Citizen-Times displaying the headline, "Buncombe Democrats frustrated by GOP," the Republican senator blamed the article for causing his wife to order a second drink with dinner. "She was just fuming," he said. "Had I had a chance to write this article, I would have titled it something like, 'North Carolina is doing great and the Asheville Citizen-Times won't print it,'" Edwards continued.

According to Edwards, in addition to composing headlines to which he objects, the Citizen-Times does not allow him to dictate what topics the newspaper covers. "I've sent several press releases with some great things that have essentially been ignored," he said. In a dig at Buncombe legislators, he added, "If you spent your time in this past session trying to name spiders or legalize marijuana, then you deserve to be frustrated." Some of the good news that is going unreported, Edwards said, includes measures of North Carolina's fiscal stability, including the state's AAA bond rating and a July 11 ranking from George Mason University's Mercatus Center as 15th among states for fiscal strength.

Economics aren't the only good news, the senator said. This year, "North Carolina also celebrates having its highest-ever fourth-grade reading proficiency, with 74 percent of fourth graders reading at or above grade level," he told the crowd.

Rep. Brian Turner also addressed the gathering, which filled the meeting room at UNC Asheville's Sherrill Center. The Buncombe Democrat is working to increase the number of school counselors, which he described as inadequate to meet the needs of large numbers of North Carolina students affected by trauma. Dealing with the state and local opioid addiction crisis, he said, is an important priority.(Virginia Daffron, MOUNTAIN XPRESS, 7/14/17).

Behavioral Health Center

A planned behavioral health crisis center in east Winston-Salem will now include a physical health component through a joint venture by Novant Health Inc. and Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center. The health-care systems have agreed to operate an 8,339-square-foot primary care center providing physical and other direct treatment care. The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners approved on Thursday an amendment to the lease that Cardinal Innovations Healthcare Solutions has on the building and a 4.1-acre site. The amendment calls for the physical care clinic to operate for at least seven years.

In June 2015, the county commissioners approved a 40-year lease with CenterPoint Human Services to establish a behavioral health crisis center serving Forsyth, Davie, Rockingham and Stokes counties. Cardinal took over the lease when it acquired CenterPoint in July 2016. It was announced June 25 that the Highland center is shifting from being a place with inpatient beds and round-the-clock care to one that would keep people less than a day and serve them primarily with chairs instead of beds. The center is expected to include a community wellness center and administrative offices. The primary goal of the planned behavioral health crisis center is to help ease overcrowding in hospital emergency rooms by diverting individuals experiencing a mental health and/or substance abuse crisis to the Highland center.(Richard Craver, WINSTON-SALEM JOURNAL, 7/16/17).

GenX Chemical

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper is asking federal officials to set standards for a chemical he recently asked a manufacturer to stop dumping into a river that provides drinking water along the coast. In a letter Monday, Cooper told the Environmental Protection Agency he needs rules on the discharge of a chemical named GenX so he can make his request to the company mandatory. The chemical is a byproduct of manufacturing and was making its way into the Cape Fear River from Chemours' plant in Fayetteville. The company agreed to Cooper's request to stop releasing the chemical last month. Scientists say there have been no definitive studies about how the chemical

affects humans. The Cape Fear River provides drinking water for Bladen, Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties.(THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 7/17/17).

Fish Ruling

A row with an appointee of President Donald Trump's administration over the regulation of flounder fishing off New Jersey jeopardizes conservation of marine species all along the East Coast, interstate fishing managers said Monday. The flatfish in question is the summer flounder, which is popular with sport fishermen and commercial fishermen from Maine to Florida. The regulatory Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission announced in June that it had found New Jersey out of compliance with management of the summer flounder fishery.

But Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross needed to sign off on the ruling, and he instead reversed it. The commission said in a statement that Ross' ruling represents the first time since passage of the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act in 1993 that a commerce secretary has failed to uphold such a noncompliance recommendation. Ross' ruling has the potential to soften the regulatory authority of the commission, which is tasked with managing fisheries along the coast, said Toni Kerns, director of the interstate fisheries management program for the Atlantic States.

Unlike some fisheries, which are concentrated in one or two states, the catch is spread out, with fishermen bringing hundreds of thousands of pounds to the docks in North Carolina, Virginia, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Maryland and Connecticut. In 2015, the commercial fishery was worth more than \$33 million, the third-highest total on record.(Patrick Whittle, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 7/17/17).

Curtis Campaign

In the midst of his third term, state Sen. David Curtis has announced his intent to campaign for reelection in 2018. Curtis, a Denver Republican and optometrist, has served Senate District 44 since he was first elected in 2012. Senate District 44 includes the entirety of Lincoln County as well as part of Iredell County and a small portion of Gaston County. Curtis is currently serving as the co-chairman of the Senate Education Committee on policy and appropriations. He will campaign against the sitting vice-chairman of the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners, Martin Oakes, who announced his campaign for state Senate last month. Curtis and Oakes will face off in the Republican primary election scheduled for May 8, 2018.(Matt Chapman, THE LINCOLN TIMES-NEWS, 7/17/17).

Economic Partnership

Anson County has joined together with two others to form a small region focused on investigating economic development possibilities through the USDA. The USDA Rural Development Center and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service at N.C. State University has formed the Uwharrie Region, an area made up of Anson, Montgomery and Stanly counties. The region, also known as the Stronger Economics Together Phase 7 (SET) was announced by the USDA on July 6. John Marek, executive director of the Anson Economic Development Partnership, said he believes the program will help identify areas Anson can work to become stronger. According to the USDA release, the SET program will help the three counties to "formulate an economic blueprint that strategically builds on the current and emerging strengths of that region." SET will not affect the independence of any of the three counties' economic development authorities. It will simply provide them with more tools. A consultant with Purdue University will work with steering committees from each region.(Imari Scarbrough, THE ANSON RECORD, 7/16/17).

Legislative Studies and Meetings

Items in **Bold** are new listings.

LB: Legislative Building

LOB: Legislative Office Building.

More Information: <http://ncleg.net/LegislativeCalendar/>

Thursday, Aug. 3

- Noon | House convenes in session.
- Noon | Senate convenes in session.

N.C. Government Meetings and Hearings

Items in **BOLD** are new listings.

Tuesday, July 18

- 1:30 p.m. | The Accountability Committee of The North Carolina Partnership for Children meets, 1100 Wake Forest Road, Raleigh. Contact: Yvonne Huntley, [919-821-9573](tel:919-821-9573).

Wednesday, July 19

- 9 a.m. | The N.C. Plant Conservation Board meets, N.C. Cooperative Extension Service Watauga County Center Conference, Room 971 W. King St., Boone.

Thursday, July 20

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Monday, July 24

- 1 p.m. | The Economic Investment Committee meets to consider one or more economic development proposals, N.C. Commerce Executive Board Room, fourth floor, 301 N. Wilmington St., Raleigh. Contact: Hannah Harrill, [919-814-4612](tel:919-814-4612).

Tuesday, July 25

- 9 a.m. | The N.C. Code Officials Qualification Board holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, 1st Floor Hearing Room, Room 131 (Albemarle Building), 325 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.
- 1 p.m. | The Board Development Committee of The North Carolina Partnership for Children meets, 1100 Wake Forest Road, Raleigh. Contact: Yvonne Huntley, [919-821-9573](tel:919-821-9573).

Wednesday, July 26

- **9 a.m. | The Wildlife Resource Commission committees meet, Commission Room, 5th Floor, 1751 Varsity Dr., Raleigh.**

Thursday, July 27

- 9 a.m. | The NC Wildlife Resources Commission meets, WRC Centennial Campus, 1751 Varsity Dr., Raleigh.

Monday, July 31

- 12 p.m. | The N.C. State Board of Elections hold public hearing on proposed rule changes, State Board of Elections Office, 441 N. Harrington St., Raleigh.

Tuesday, Aug. 1

- 12 p.m. | The UNC Board of Governors' Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs, Board Room of the Center for School Leadership Development, 140 Friday Center Dr., Chapel Hill. Contact: Josh Ellis, [919-962-4629](tel:919-962-4629).

Thursday, Aug. 3

- TBD | The Golden LEAF Foundation's board meets, TBD. Contact: Jenny Tinklepaugh, [888-684-8404](tel:888-684-8404).

Wednesday, Aug. 16

- 10:30 a.m. | The Criminal Justice Education and Training Standards Commission holds public hearing on proposed rule changes, Wake Technical Community College-Public Safety Training Center, 321 Chapanoke Road, Raleigh.

Thursday, Aug. 17

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Wednesday, Sept. 13

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Sept. 14

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Sept. 21

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Thursday, Sept. 28

- 10:30 a.m. | The Standard Commercial Fishing License Eligibility Board to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries meets, N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries' Wilmington District Office, 127 North Cardinal Dr. Extension, Wilmington.

Thursday, Oct. 5

- TBD | The Golden LEAF Foundation's board meets, TBD. Contact: Jenny Tinklepaugh, [888-684-8404](tel:888-684-8404).
- TBD | The NC Wildlife Resources Commission meets, WRC Centennial Campus, 1751 Varsity Dr., Raleigh.

Thursday, Oct. 19

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Wednesday, Nov. 8

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Nov. 9

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Nov. 16

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Thursday, Dec. 7

- TBD | The Golden LEAF Foundation's board meets, TBD. Contact: Jenny Tinklepaugh, [888-684-8404](tel:888-684-8404).
- TBD | The NC Wildlife Resources Commission meets, 1751 Varsity Dr., Raleigh.

Thursday, Dec. 21

- 10 a.m. | The N.C. Rules Review Commission meets, Administrative Hearings office, Rules Review Commission Room, 1711 New Hope Church Road, Raleigh.

Wednesday, Jan. 10

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

Thursday, Jan. 11

- 9 a.m. | Environmental Management Commission meets, Ground Floor Hearing Room, Archdale Building, 512 N. Salisbury St., Raleigh.

N.C. Dept. of Environmental Quality

The N.C. Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources has a new name - the N.C. Dept. of Environmental Quality. More Information: <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/guest/home>

Tuesday, July 18

- 6 p.m. | The N.C. Division of Water Resources hold public meeting on Atlantic Coast Pipeline Water Quality Certification, Fayetteville Technical Community College Cumberland Hall Auditorium at 2201 Hull Rd., Fayetteville.

Thursday, July 20

- 6 p.m. | The N.C. Division of Water Resources hold public meeting on Atlantic Coast Pipeline Water Quality Certification, Nash Community College Brown Auditorium at 522 N. Old Carriage Road, Rocky Mount.

Thursday, Aug. 3

- 2 p.m. | The state Department on Air Quality holds public hearing concerning incorporation of 2015 Ozone Ambient Standard and Readoption, 2145 Suttle Ave., Charlotte.

N.C. Utilities Commission Hearing Schedule

Dobbs Building
430 North Salisbury Street
Raleigh, North Carolina
More Information: <http://www.ncuc.commerce.state.nc.us/activities/activit.htm>

Monday, July 24

- Staff Conference

Monday, July 31

- Staff Conference

UNC Board of Governors

Board Room of the UNC Center for School Leadership Development
140 Friday Center Drive, Chapel Hill (**remote meeting locations in BOLD**)
More Information: <https://www.northcarolina.edu/bog/schedule.php>

Tuesday, Aug. 1

- 12 p.m. | The Board of Governors' Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs, Board Room of the Center for School Leadership Development, 140 Friday Center Dr., Chapel Hill.

Friday, Sept. 8

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Friday, Nov. 3

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Friday, Dec. 15

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Friday, Jan. 26, 2018

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Friday, March 23, 2018

- TBA | UNC Wilmington, Wilmington.

Friday, May 25, 2018

- TBA | The UNC Board of Governors, C.S.L.D. Building, Chapel Hill.

Other Meetings and Events of Interest

Items in **BOLD** are new listings.

Tuesday, July 18

- **2:30 p.m. | Gov. Roy Cooper delivers remarks at the unveiling of Walgreens pharmacy's new safe medication disposal kiosk to help combat the opioid crisis, Walgreens, 8538 N. Tryon St., Charlotte.**

Sunday, July 30

- TBD | The NC Bankers Association host 81st Annual NC School of Banking, William & Ida Friday Center, UNC-Chapel Hill. The conference concludes on Aug. 4.

Monday, Aug. 14

- No time given | U.S. Small Business Administration deadline for businesses, private nonprofit organizations, homeowners, and renters in North Carolina to submit disaster loan applications for damages caused by the severe storms on May 30.

Friday, Sept. 8

- No Time Given | The 77th Annual National Folk Festival opens in Downtown Greensboro for its third year in the state. Contact: Kaitlin Smith, [336-373-7523](tel:336-373-7523), ext 246.

Sunday, Sept. 24

- TBD | The NC Bankers Association hold Young Bankers Conference, Crowne Plaza Asheville Resort, Asheville.

Wednesday, Oct. 11

- 10 a.m. | The Carolinas Air Pollution Control Association hold Technical Workshop and Forum, Hilton Myrtle Beach Resort, 10000 Beach Club Dr., Myrtle Beach.

Monday, Nov. 6

- TBD | The NC Bankers Association hold Women in Banking Conference, Renaissance Charlotte Southpark, 5501 Carnegie Blvd., Charlotte.

Insider State Government News Service

P.O. Box 191, Raleigh, N.C. 27602-9150

Customer Service [\(919\) 836-2807](tel:919-836-2807)

Legislative Office [\(919\) 832-8358](tel:919-832-8358)

www.ncinsider.com

Colin Campbell, Editor (ccampbell@ncinsider.com) - [\(919\) 829-4698](tel:919-829-4698)

Lauren Horsch, Insider Reporter (lhorsch@ncinsider.com) - [\(919\) 836-2801](tel:919-836-2801)

Matthew Betts, Customer Service Manager (mbetts@ncinsider.com) - [\(919\) 836-2807](tel:919-836-2807)

Graham Hoppe, Production Editor (ghoppe@ncinsider.com) - [\(919\) 829-8951](tel:919-829-8951)

Clifton Dowell, General Manager (cdowell@ncinsider.com) - [\(919\) 836-2804](tel:919-836-2804)

© Copyright 2017 The Insider. Any reproduction or retransmission of The Insider North Carolina State Government News Service, in whole or in part, is a violation of federal law and strictly prohibited without permission. All rights reserved.

